Reviews

Music

MAGGIE ROGERS' NEW FREEDOM

A pop-music prodigy delivers her complicated second album

By JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

Maggie Rogers
Surrender
CAPITOL
★★★½☆

THE STARK cover of Maggie Rogers' second album makes a statement: Gone are the twilight hues and soft focus of her 2019 debut, *Heard It in a Past Life,* and their suggestion of a young artist working her way through her own thrilling ascendance. That album capped off a several-year process of Rogers' coronation as the Next Big Thing, earning her arena slots opening for Kacey Musgraves and a Best New Artist Grammy nomination. The zoomed-in black-and-white photo on the cover of *Surrender* lets us know that her swift coronation has now led to a more complicated reality.

It also suggests an artist who's in it for the long haul: "You tell me you want →

ILLUSTRATION BY
Jody Hewgill

MAGGIE ROGERS

everything, you want it fast," Rogers sings on "Anywhere With You," the record's cathartic centerpiece. The narrator and their partner are desperate for a quick fix, to flee their problems and escape town, go joyriding anywhere, even I-95. But Rogers has a response: "All I ever wanted is to make something fucking last."

Rogers' debut was a showcase for her eclectic, prodigious ambition; she's someone who can command banjo-strummed roots music, streaming-friendly synth-pop, and anthemic arena rock. *Surrender* feels less hungry to impress. It seems to reflect what the 28-year-old singer-songwriter is most interested in at this very moment, which appears to be a blend of Nineties alt-rock and turn-of-the-century shopping-mall pop. A few of the endless array of touchstones: "Criminal"-era Fiona Apple; iPod-era U2; early-2000s Pink; and most of all, Alanis Morissette, whose *Jagged Little Pill* seems like a primary reference point.

Rogers (a former aspiring music critic and recent divinity-school graduate) self-consciously dabbles in several tropes that are often native to second albums by hyped artists: restlessness with semi-stardom ("Honey"); nostalgia for a carefree adolescence ("Shatter"); anxiety about no longer feeling grounded ("Symphony"); a desire to escape responsibility ("Horses"). The insistence that she's a career artist here to stay might be the most convincing.

It's no surprise that on an album about seeking escape, Rogers has turned toward the sounds and comforts of her youth. On "Be Cool," she daydreams about spending just one night listening to Britney Spears with old pals. On the very next song, "Shatter," she conjures *Fearless*-era Taylor Swift: "We're going back/To being 16, flying like you'll never collapse."

Then there's "Begging for Rain," on which Rogers channels Bonnie Raitt's version of John Prine's classic song "Angel From Montgomery": "You work all day to find religion/And end up standing in your kitchen." Rogers sounds a bit fed up and even more tired, as she "keep[s] waiting" on a thunderstorm to finally provide some respite. But if Maggie Rogers tells us anything on *Surrender*, it's that she's in no rush to get wherever her talent takes her. ®

COUNTRY'S GROWN-UP BRO

Luke Combs nudges Nashville clichés in the right direction on his third album By MAURA K. JOHNSTON

LUKE COMBS wants you to know one thing: He's a regular guy. He might be playing songs that immediately become playlist staples, but those ballads and rockers are, he maintains, the same ones he'd be playing if he were only outfitted with, as he croons on the opening track of his third album, *Growin' Up*, "tips in a jar, my guitar, and an old barstool." The 32-year-old North Carolinian, reigning Country Music Entertainer of the Year, stadium headliner, and holder of multiple platinum records, is trying hard to not be starstruck by his own success. Mostly, it works.

Luke Combs
Growin' Up
Sony Nashville
★★★½☆

While similar claims of humility from megastars can come off as a bit far-fetched, the dozen songs on *Growin' Up* bear out the just-from-the-heart assertions that appear on the slow-burning "Doin' This." Combs adds just enough modern-day brawn to Nashville songwriting ideals to make the LP an enjoyable, and at times moving, spin through his world of small-town bars and big-hearted people.

On *Growin' Up*, these classic country topics are elevated by Combs' vocals. His robust, rough-edged tenor adds a warmth to his nostalgia-drenched songs, like the road-not-taken chronicle "Used to Wish I Was," as well as the references to the songs and artists he loves, like Garth Brooks and George Jones.

"Any Given Friday Night," which in lesser hands would be a run-of-the-mill bro-country ode to small-town weekend bacchanalia, gets its power from Combs' obvious affection for those who pre-game in DQ parking lots in "pick a map dot town[s]," as well as grime-caked guitars that hint at the messiness awaiting those revelers in the later hours. Those riffs are part of *Growin' Up*'s sonic maturity; its spacious production, helmed by Combs alongside co-producers Chip Matthews and Jonathan Singleton, allows guitar licks and thumping bass lines to tug songs in sometimes surprising directions.

"The Kind of Love We Make," a gently urgent come-on to a woman who's been too stressed-out to let loose in the bedroom, is a country revamp of midtempo Nineties alt-adult cuts like Semisonic's "Secret Smile"; the rave-up "Ain't Far From It" depicts one of the dates that could eventually lead to those moments of committed bliss, with Combs' flirtations egged on by honky-tonk pianos and saucy licks.

Combs isn't reinventing Nashville's four-wheel clichés on *Growin' Up*; he's merely giving it a fresh coat of wax and removing the more ostentatious add-ons. But his detail-rich songs make *Growin' Up* a big-time country album with a tip-jar-worthy intimacy. ®

BREAKING

Trueno's Brave New Old-School Rap

ARGENTINE RAPPER Trueno is just 20, but he's already realizing his potential as one of South American hip-hop's most compelling new voices. Songs like "Hoop Hoop" and "Fuck el Police," from his excellent second album, *Bien o Mal*, are steeped in old-school American hip-hop. Splitting the 13 tracks between two sides, "The Bad" and "The Good," Trueno raps about dictatorships, economic hardships, crime, and inequality, while urging people to rise and stand together. He says he wanted to turn "the idea of protesting into a celebration," and that's exactly what he does. The result is one of the year's sharpest breakout releases. **JULYSSA LOPEZ**

FROM TOP: JEREMY COWART; IMAGINE IT MEDIA

★★★★★ Classic | ★★★★ Excellent | ★★★ Good | ★★ Fair | ★ Poor RATINGS ARE SUPERVISED BY THE EDITORS OF ROLLING STONE.

Paige
"Forever"
PierreTheChosen

REVIEWS

BIGGER THAN THE NINETIES

Two indie-pop artists expand their sounds on great new albums

WHEN SOCCER Mommy broke out of her Nashville bedroom with her 2018 debut, *Clean*, she was a leader in the Liz Phair-loving Nineties-rock revival. Now, on her third album, she's still a master of that sound ("Shotgun" is dream-pop perfection). But there's a more multifaceted angst here, too, especially on glitchy, grueling tunes like "Unholy Affliction" and "Darkness Forever." The musical and emotional shadow play on the album makes the mind-clearing grandeur of moments like "Feel It All the Time" seem more earned.

Soccer Mommy
Sometimes, Forever
★★★★☆

Beabadoo-bee
Beatopia
★★★★☆

Beatrice Laus (the London artist who records as Beabadoobee) spends most of her second album in the sunshine – from an acoustic pleasantry like "Ripples" to the bossa-nova-touched "The Perfect Pair" to the dappled jangle of "Pictures of Us." She rocks on "Talk," which starts out sounding like Madchester in 1989 and turns into offhandedly trenchant power pop an Olivia Rodrigo fan could get down with: "We go together like the gum on my shoes," she sings to some poor sucker, showing she's as good with sick burns as she is with plush tunes. **JON DOLAN**

Quick Hits

Ten new albums you need to know about now

Hercules and Love Affair
In Amber
BMG

TOUGH LOVE House-music revivalist Andy Butler leaves smooth grooves behind for a bracing, at times beautiful, LP of dark art-pop abstraction, featuring heart-ripping vocals from brilliant avant-diva ANOHNI.

★★★½☆

Regina Spektor
Home, Before and After
Warner

PIANO POET The New York-based singer-songwriter has been killing it for years as a Joni Mitchell or Tori Amos for the Lower East Side, and this incisive, empathetic collection is among her strongest.

★★★½☆

Amanda Shires
Take It Like a Man
ATO

BIG COUNTRY One of Nashville's most-gifted singer-songwriters continues to expand her folk-based sound, mixing Radiohead-style atmospherics, Seventies pop melodies, and even a splash of soul.

★★★½☆

Tedeschi Trucks Band
I Am the Moon
Fantasy

LONG HAUL This ambitious rock band is spreading its new 24-song release over a series of mini LPs, each worth your while; they make Southern-rock and classic-rock history seem present in our time.

★★★½☆

Tove Styrke
Hard
Sony

SWEET SWEDE The fourth album from this Swedish pop singer delivers Robyn-style dance-pop confessionals that can be intense ("Hardcore"), tender ("Show Me Love"), and clever ("Millennial Blues").

★★★½☆

070 Shake
You Can't Kill Me
G.O.O.D. Music/Def Jam

DEEP SHAKE Danielle Balbuena makes moody R&B that's been compared to Pink Floyd (by us). Here, she stretches out further, with elegiac bangers that are all about slo-mo self-discovery.

★★★½☆

Jack White
Entering Heaven Alive
Third Man

LAID-BACK JACK White's second album of the year is a mostly acoustic set that reins in some of the zanier impulses of his recent work to make one of his more enjoyable LPs in a while.

★★★½☆

Superorganism
World Wide Pop
Domino

TOO-HYPER POP Psychedelic indie-pop crew Superorganism had a great hit a few years back with "Something for Your M.I.N.D." This fire hose of arch-pop cleverness will overload even the sharpest mind.

★★★☆☆

Dawes
Misadventures of a Doomscroller
Rounder

SLIGHT SUNSHINE The mutable roots band channels Jackson Browne and the Dead, with lots of genteel guitars and light alienation — if only the lyrics were as articulate as the melodies and playing.

★★★☆☆

black midi
Hellfire
Rough Trade

BLACK SHITTY Once a very cool post-punk band, London's black midi take a serious detour into pretentious overreach here. The worst bit sounds like Pere Ubu doing ironic nightclub jazz.

★★½☆☆

CONTRIBUTORS: DAVID BROWNE, JON DOLAN, JON FREEMAN

FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: FILMMAGIC; ANDREW BENGE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTOPHER POLK FOR VARIETY; ERIKA GOLDRING/GETTY IMAGES

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